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Campaign Aims to Raise Cash for Legal Groups That Help Poor

PHOENIX (AP) - A campaign is under way to raise up to \$3 million from state lawyers for three legal aid organizations that help poor clients with civil issues.

The money raised by the Arizona Equal Justice Campaign will help Community Legal Services, Southern Arizona Legal Aid and DNA-People's Legal Services hire more attorneys, said campaign coordinator Nancy Guadagno.

In 2000, the organizations lacked the resources needed to serve two-thirds of its applicants, or more than 50,000 people.

The problem developed as Arizona's population grew but federal support for legal aid remained steady, Guadagno said. At the same time, income from interest on lawyers' trust accounts, administered by the State Bar of Arizona, declined as interest rates fell.

"There is a huge unmet need," Guadagno said.

Of the 21,000 people served by the groups in 2000, more than 8,000 cases were related to family law, such as child support or custody issues. Almost 5,000 clients needed help to gain access to health care, education and employment.

Don Bivens, of the Meyer, Hendricks & Bivens law firm in Phoenix, said the campaign has already exceeded his expectations.

The campaign has raised cash or pledges of \$1.4 million from law firms and associated businesses.

"Hardly anyone has said no," said Bivens, co-chairman of the campaign. "This may be the most significant legal fund-raising ever conducted in the state."